

Domestic Security Lighting

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Since the first cave dweller discovered fire, mankind has used light as a defence against animals and other predators. It is now simple and cheap to provide and operate outdoor lighting, which would have amazed our ancestors by the amount of light produced.

Well designed, installed and maintained security lights bring comfort and well-being to our lives providing us with a sense of security in our homes. However, much security lighting is installed without due consideration of its suitability for the task and its effects on neighbours and the environment. Domestic security lights should provide the minimum level of illumination necessary to light a property. Whilst you may be happy with a light that illuminates half the street, your neighbours may not.

The price and ease of installation cause many people to install tungsten halogen floodlights. These units can provide satisfactory security lighting if correctly installed and aimed, however, it is rarely necessary to use a lamp of greater than 2000 lumens (150W) in such fittings. The use of a higher power only causes more glare and darker shadows. Glare affects our ability to see and dark shadows offer a convenient hiding place for miscreants.

Many of these floodlights are fitted with detectors to sense the movement of intruders. Unfortunately, if badly installed, they also detect small animals roaming around the garden causing the light to switch on and off throughout the night. This can be a nuisance to neighbours.

Movement detectors can be useful if they are correctly installed and aimed. Unfortunately, many systems do not allow the detector to be separately aimed from the floodlight.

Floodlights and detectors should be aimed to only detect and light people on your property. They should not detect a person or animals walking down the street.

For many properties, a better solution for security lighting is to use a bulkhead or porch lights fitted with a low power 600-900 lumens (9/11w) compact fluorescent lamp. These units can be left lit all night, providing all night security, for only a few pounds of electricity per year.

Besides being cheap to run, this type of light is kinder to the environment providing a gentle wash of light with reduced glare. Bulkhead and porch lights cast few shadows reducing the hiding places. These units can be fitted with a movement detector if required. These units are generally mounted lower and are therefore less susceptible to nuisance switching and complaints from neighbours.

When aiming floodlights make sure you only light the area that needs lighting. The aim of the floodlight can easily be checked at night when you can see the actual area being lit. Be careful not to put light onto other peoples' properties or into windows as this can be very upsetting and a constant source of complaint. If a neighbour does complain, you could adjust the light to shine in a different direction or angle it down to reduce the light onto or into their property. If after adjusting the angle and aim of the floodlight it is still causing annoyance and upset, then consider fitting a hood or shield to control and restrict the light to the area to be lit.